

**A Humanitarian Success:  
Westerners' Protection of Chinese Refugees in the Rape of Nanking, 1937-38**

Research Thesis

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On July 7, 1937, the Japanese military attacked the Chinese military stationed in Beiping,<sup>1</sup> and that date is considered the starting date of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). One month later, on August 13, 1937, the Japanese military and the Chinese military met each other again in Shanghai, and the battle was known as the Battle of Shanghai of 1937 (*Songhu huizhan*).<sup>2</sup> In that battle, the Chinese troops were forced to withdraw by November 11, 1937 after the Japanese landed their reinforcements at Hangzhou Bay on November 5, 1937. The Japanese military immediately marched on Nanjing, the capital of the Republic of China (*Zhonghua minguo*), and on December 13, 1937 Nanjing was lost to the Japanese.

In the subsequent six weeks, the Japanese atrocities of rape, plundering, and murder terrified the city. The tragedy was later known as The Rape of Nanking (*Nanjing datusha*) and more than 200,000 Chinese people were killed.<sup>3</sup> The Japanese soldiers were almost unstoppable in committing atrocities, but a group of Westerners who did not leave the city before it was conquered established a so-called Nanjing Safety Zone (*Nanjing anquanqu*) to protect hundreds of thousands of Chinese refugees. An International Committee operated the Nanjing Safety Zone (*Nanjing guoji anquanqu weiyuanhui*). On November 22, 1937, the International Committee for the Nanjing Safety Zone was formally instituted and John Rabe (1882-1950), the representative of Siemens (a German corporation) in China and a Nazi Party member, was elected chair.<sup>4</sup> Fifteen members from the United States (7), Germany (4), Britain (3), and Denmark (1) were actively

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<sup>1</sup> Beijing, the capital of the People's Republic of China, was changed to another name, Beiping by the Nationalist government in 1928 when the government announced Nanjing as the new capital. It was not until 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party entered Beiping that the city's name was changed again to Beijing.

<sup>2</sup> As early as January 28, 1932, the Chinese army resisted the Japanese military in Shanghai, and the battle ended up with a truce agreed by both sides. The event was known as the Shanghai Incident of 1932.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Brook, ed., *Documents on the Rape of Nanking* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 261.

<sup>4</sup> John E. Woods, trans., *The Good Man of Nanking: The Diaries of John Rabe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 27.

involved in preventing noncombatants from the Japanese atrocities in Nanjing.<sup>5</sup> The International Committee played the leading role in the relief work of the refugees until January 1938 when the Japanese authority inaugurated the collaborationist Self-Government Committee (Zizhi weiyuanhui). The International Committee changed its name to the Nanking International Relief Committee (Nanjing guoji jiuji weiyuanhui) in February 1938 after the Western embassies returned to Nanjing.<sup>6</sup>

Studies of the Rape of Nanking cannot be considered complete without an examination of the significance of the Westerners remaining in Nanjing. As Tadashi Wakabayashi points out in *The Nanking Atrocity 1937-38*:

In the face of immense difficulties and despite harsh criticism from the Japanese, Westerners who chose to remain in Nanking rather than flee to safety achieved their humanitarian aims. They were by no means neutral in the hostilities, and they saved huge numbers of Chinese lives, acting heroically under very trying circumstances.<sup>7</sup>

By studying the difficulties and pressures the International Committee had from the Japanese authorities, or even the Chinese government, historians should realize that without the efforts by the Westerners in Nanjing, more refugees could have died from famine, murder and rape, and the Nanjing Safety Zone would not have been a success. The later part of this essay will present the food supplies dilemma the International Committee faced and how the Westerners solved the dilemma. This thesis therefore argues that the contributions by the Westerners are critical to the successful operation of the Nanjing Safety Zone.

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<sup>5</sup> Hsu Shuhsi, "Documents of the Nanking Safety Zone," in *Documents on the Rape of Nanking*, ed. Timothy Brook (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Tadashi Wakabayashi, ed. *The Nanking Atrocity 1937-38: Complicating the Picture* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 241.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

The very origin of the concept of safety zone in Europe had significant impact on the International Committee for the Nanjing Safety Zone. Marcia R. Ristaino in her book, *The Jacquinet Safe Zone: Wartime Refugees in Shanghai*, told the history of the concept of safety zone and examined the connection between the Jacquinet Safe Zone of Shanghai (Shanghai raojiaju anquanqu) in November 1937 and Georges Saint-Paul's (1870-1937) concept of safety zone in 1929 for noncombatants during wartime.<sup>8</sup> Then, Father Jacquinet's success of operating the Safe Zone inspired the Westerners in Nanjing who later inaugurated the International Committee for the Nanjing Safety Zone in November 1937.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the concept of the Nanjing Safety Zone indeed stemmed from Europe.

According to Ristaino, astonished by the chaos and atrocities during World War I (1914-1918), Saint-Paul proposed the creation of neutral zones where noncombatants could be protected during wartime in 1929. Two years later, the Association des Lieux de Genève (Association of Geneva Zones) was founded by Saint-Paul in Paris to promote the concept of safety zone.<sup>10</sup> The Third Geneva Convention, which was concerned with humanitarian protections for sick or wounded military personnel (including prisoners of wars), was also held in 1929. Unfortunately, the Geneva Convention of 1929 did not mention protection for noncombatants. As a result, the concept of the safety zone for noncombatants was not universally accepted by many countries. Japan was one of them.<sup>11</sup> The French Chamber of Deputies did propose international and official backing to Saint-Paul's idea of safety zone to the League of Nations in 1935, but the progress was

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<sup>8</sup> The Jacquinet Safe Zone, or the Shanghai Safety Zone, was created by Father Robert Jacquinet de Besange (1878-1946), a French Jesuit, during the Battle of Shanghai in 1937. Georges Saint-Paul was a French surgeon-general.

<sup>9</sup> Zhang Kaiyuan, ed., *Eyewitnesses to Massacre: American Missionaries Bear Eyewitness to Japanese Atrocities in Nanjing* (Armonk, NY: An East Gate Book, 2001), 245.

<sup>10</sup> Marcia R. Ristaino, *The Jacquinet Safe Zone: Wartime Refugees in Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

slow and many questioned the feasibility of the idea.<sup>12</sup> In other words, any establishment of safety zones for noncombatants could be considered illegitimate based on the theme of the Geneva Convention of 1929 (humanitarian protections solely for sick or wounded military personnel) and the warring parties had no obligation to respect these safety zones.

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) provided the safety zone advocates with the opportunity to make the first attempt to create safety zones for noncombatants without official support by the League of Nations. Unfortunately, the attempt eventually failed. Following Saint-Paul's death in 1937, Henry George (bio date unavailable), a Swiss citizen motivated by Saint-Paul, created a new organization in Geneva which bore the same name as the one Saint-Paul established in Paris: the Association International des Lieux de Genève. George proposed creating safety zones for noncombatants to the Spanish authorities and the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>13</sup> The Red Cross did not support the proposal, because they thought it was too late to set up safety zones in the midst of war and doubted the feasibility.<sup>14</sup> The most important reason why they doubted the feasibility was, as discussed earlier, that the Geneva Conventions of 1929 did not mention the protection of noncombatants, and the warring parties had no obligations to allow the existence of safety zones for noncombatants.

The attempt to establish safety zones in the Spanish Civil War turned out to be a failure, but another attempt made later in Shanghai where the Chinese and the Japanese were fighting fiercely was said to be the first successful example of safety zones. Father Robert Jacquinet de Besange, according to Ristaino, was actually among the very first advocates of the idea of safety

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 55-56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 59.

zone in Europe like Georges Saint-Paul.<sup>15</sup> As early as January 1932, one year after Saint-Paul founded the Association de Lieux de Genève, Father Jacquinot was devoted to protecting civilians in the Shanghai Incident of 1932 (*Yi'erba shibian*). The Japanese air force was the first ever to bomb civilians in 1932, four years earlier than the Fascist German pilots in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>16</sup> The indiscriminate bombing by the Japanese raised Father Jacquinot's concern with the safety of the civilians, and he felt it necessary to launch a rescue mission for noncombatants and wounded soldiers of all nations trapped in the battlefield.<sup>17</sup> The rescue mission was achieved when both the Chinese and Japanese authority agreed to a four-hour truce.<sup>18</sup> Father Jacquinot's efforts in rescuing refugees in the Shanghai Incident of 1932 did not end up with establishing a specific safety zone solely designed for noncombatants. Rather, the International Settlement offered a few refugee camps within the concession.<sup>19</sup> Despite Father Jacquinot's not building a safety zone specifically for noncombatants in 1932, his efforts in organizing refugee camps provided him with valuable experience in rescuing noncombatants for the upcoming Battle of Shanghai in 1937.

Father Jacquinot's reputation reached a new height after his contributions in the Shanghai Incident of 1932, and the reverence he earned prepared him well enough to establish the first successful safety zone in 1937. On August 13, 1937, the Chinese military and the Japanese military initiated the Battle of Shanghai, which lasted about three months. Massive casualties occurred, and many civilians became victims. For instance, on August 14, 1937, the Chinese air force began if the first aerial bombing in the Battle of Shanghai. Unexpected tragedy occurred when a Chinese

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 41-42

<sup>19</sup> Shanghai had been a treaty port since the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 when the British defeated the Qing dynasty and forced the Qing government to open five treaty ports. Shanghai was one of the first five treaty ports. Later on, foreign settlements were established by foreign powers like the Great Britain, France and the United States. The International Settlement was a British-American controlled foreign settlement.

pilot dropped a bomb near the Cathay Hotel, and a huge number of Chinese died.<sup>20</sup> On November 9, 1937, after approval by the Chinese and the Japanese, Father Jacquinot officially inaugurated the Shanghai Safety Zone (Shanghai anquanqu), which was also called the Jacquinot Safe Zone. The Jacquinot Safe Zone, according to Ristaino, hosted 250,000-360,000 refugees.<sup>21</sup> The Jacquinot Safe Zone was set up outside the foreign settlements and “had its southern border formed by Fang Bang Road, completely crossing the old Chinese city; Min Guo Road, the former site of the old city wall, formed the northern boundary. French Concession boundaries formed the eastern and western borders of the zone.”<sup>22</sup> Father Jacquinot gave an interpretation of such a safe zone:

This district in Nanshi (Nantao), a place of safety for the civilian populations, is not a “neutral zone,” for it is neither neutral nor a zone; it is not rightly called a demilitarized region; it is certainly not arranged for the French interests nor to protect the Church property in Nanshi...It is purely and simply what it is called: a district of safety for the non-combatants. It has been possible because both the Japanese and the Chinese are desirous, for humanitarian reasons, to protect the non-combatants.<sup>23</sup>

Jacquinot’s interpretation of the Shanghai Safety Zone implied that he was heavily influenced by the concept of safety zone advocated in Europe. He emphasized the Shanghai Safety Zone was “a district of safety for the non-combatants” and the warring parties should support the idea “for humanitarian reasons.”<sup>24</sup> European advocates of the idea of safety zone distinguished themselves from the sponsors of the Geneva Convention of 1929 and some members of the League of Nations by appealing for noncombatants’ safety in wartime. The idea of the Jacquinot Safe Zone in

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<sup>20</sup> The bombing was intended for the Japanese ships stationed on the Huangpu River. The Cathay Hotel, owned by Sir Victor Sassoon (1881-1961), was located on the Bund and faced the Huangpu River. The bombing, therefore, could have been merely an accident because of the Chinese pilot’s carelessness and miscalculation. Still, the bombing caused massive casualty.

<sup>21</sup> Ristaino, *Jacquinot*, 54.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>23</sup> *China Weekly Review*, “China at War,” in *The Jacquinot Safe Zone: Wartime Refugees in Shanghai*, ed. Marcia R. Ristaino (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 55.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Shanghai therefore originated from Europe and the operation of the Safe Zone was deemed as the first successful example of establishing an effective safety zone.

An important factor for successfully establishing the Jacquinet Safe Zone was Father Jacquinet's nationality. According to Ristaino, holding a foreign nationality benefited Father Jacquinet in maintaining his neutral status during the negotiation with both the Chinese and Japanese sides.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the members of the Nanshi Supervisory Committee, which was responsible for the operation of the Jacquinet Safe Zone, came from multiple countries: three French, two British, one Norwegian, and one American.<sup>26</sup> The neutral status of the entire Committee significantly augmented the chance to have both the Chinese and the Japanese accept the Safe Zone. Because the concept of safety zone stemmed from Europe, Europeans had a better understanding of the concept than the Japanese did.<sup>27</sup> The Japanese government was among those who questioned the feasibility of the safety zone, and they could ignore the obligation to respect any safety zones. The reason the Japanese authorities approved the Jacquinet Safe Zone was because the Japanese government was concerned with the presence of foreign powers in Shanghai and wanted to maintain its reputation among foreign powers in Shanghai.

When the Japanese accomplished the conquest of Shanghai in November 1937, Nanjing, the capital city of Republic of China, which was northwest of Shanghai, became the next target of the Japanese army. Immediately after Shanghai was lost to Japanese, the Japanese marched on Nanjing and soon arrived at the gates of Nanjing, preparing for the final strike in early December 1937. In the city, on November 20, 1937, Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), the Generalissimo of the Nanjing Nationalist-Party government, announced the evacuation of the central government to

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<sup>25</sup> Ristaino, *Jacquinet*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.



Chongqing.<sup>28</sup> Before his departure, Chiang appointed General Tang Shengzhi (1889-1970) as the commander of the defense of Nanjing. General Tang became the highest official of whom the International Committee for Nanjing Safety Zone could ask for cooperation when organizing the Nanjing Safety Zone. The Nationalist-Party government, before it left for Chongqing, promised the International Committee with supplies such as currency and foods. Although the Jacquinot Safe Zone was usually considered the archetype of the Nanjing Safety Zone, there were three differences between these two.

First, the Nanjing Safety Zone was not approved by the Japanese government, but the Jacquinot Safe Zone was operated under the Japanese permission. Inspired by what Father Jacquinot had accomplished in Shanghai, the International Committee in Nanjing felt that with Father Jacquinot's help in negotiating with the Japanese authorities in Shanghai, the Nanjing Safety Zone would more likely become another successful example of creating a safety zone for noncombatants. The proposal was sent to the Japanese authorities in Shanghai via telegram by the International Committee on November 22, 1937, the same day as the International Committee was instituted.<sup>29</sup> On December 2, 1937, Father Jacquinot replied to the International Committee in Nanjing, stating, "Japanese authorities have duly noted request for safety zone but regret cannot grant it. In the event of Chinese forces misbehavior towards civilians and/or property, [Japanese authorities] cannot assume responsibility, but they themselves will endeavor to respect the district as far as consistent with military necessity."<sup>30</sup> John Rabe considered the reply was "generally

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<sup>28</sup> Chongqing was an important hinterland city in west China. Since the settlement of the Nationalist government in 1937, Chongqing had been the provisional capital in place of Nanjing for eight years. In March 1940, another "Nanjing Nationalist government", or the Reorganized Government was instituted under the leadership of Wang jingwei (1883-1944) as a puppet regime (Wang wei zhengquan) controlled by the Japanese government. The Chongqing Nationalist government was considered as the sole legitimate Chinese government by most countries in the World.

<sup>29</sup> Woods, *Good Man*, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Woods, *Good Man*, 46.

favorable” and was satisfied to learn the Japanese would try to respect the Safety Zone.<sup>31</sup> Although Rabe was optimistic about the Japanese response, the Japanese might not have been happy with the request from the International Committee. After all, in such a short time span, two safety zones were proposed and the Japanese authorities might think it unacceptable. Moreover, the Japanese had not yet marched on Nanjing and they knew little about the likely impact of the location of the Nanjing Safety Zone on their progress in taking the city.

Secondly, Shanghai was a treaty port with the presence of the Western authorities during the Battle of Shanghai, but Westerners and embassies in Nanjing mostly moved away prior to the fall of Nanjing in December 1937. Although Nanjing was also a treaty port, there was no international settlement.<sup>32</sup> After the departure of the Western embassies, no Western authority remained. The Chinese military retreated from Shanghai on November 11, 1937, and the Japanese military won the battle. The Japanese military, however, only occupied Chinese-administered Shanghai. The foreign settlements were still controlled by the Westerners. The International Settlement administered by British and American authorities was involved in the relief work of refugees as early as the Shanghai Incident in 1932. According to a report on September 7, 1937 by *Shenbao*, one of the most influential local newspapers in Shanghai, again, the International Settlement, prior to the establishment of the Jacquinot Safe Zone, was responsible for receiving about 500,000 Chinese refugees.<sup>33</sup> The foreign authorities remained in Shanghai during the battle, because the Japanese had no right to enter the foreign settlements, which were treated territories of Western countries. There was, however, no foreign territory in Nanjing, since Nanjing was the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Nanjing became a treaty port in 1858 when Qing government signed the Treaties of Tianjin with British and French governments.

<sup>33</sup> Ristaino, *Jacquinot*, 49.

capital of the Republic of China and the Westerners did not request settlements in the capital of a sovereign state.<sup>34</sup>

Prior to the arrival of the Japanese at the gates of Nanjing, foreign embassies in the city had begun the evacuation of their citizens as early as August 16, 1937, one day after Japan's first aerial bombing on Nanjing. According to Minnie Vautrin (1886-1942), an American missionary teaching at Ginling Girls College (Jinling nǚzi xueyuan), the American women and children were among the first to be evacuated to Hankou, a hinterland city.<sup>35</sup> The United States Embassy issued its last warning of evacuation to the U.S. citizens remaining in Nanjing on December 3, 1937.<sup>36</sup> Most staff of the German Embassy also departed Nanjing for Hankou on November 22, 1937, while three diplomats stayed behind.<sup>37</sup> At the end of the defense of Nanjing on December 13, 1937, twenty-four Westerners reportedly remained in the city or in the suburbs of Nanjing: fourteen Americans, six Germans, two White Russians, one Austrian, and one Dane.<sup>38</sup> Most of the remaining Westerners were businessmen and missionaries who was unable to give too much pressure on the Japanese authorities to stop the atrocities coming up later.

Thirdly, for the first time, citizens of Fascist Germany were involved in operating a safety zone. Perhaps, it was because of the Germans' existence in Nanjing that the International Committee, which was led by a Nazi Party member, could overcome the difficulty that most of the Westerners in the city had no foreign government backgrounds. Even though the Germans in Nanjing made contributions to the Nanjing Safety Zone, Fascist Germany was historically opposed

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, most foreign embassies remained in Beiping by 1935, though the Nanjing Nationalist government announced Nanjing as the capital of the Republic of China in 1927. *Nanjing renkou zhi*, in *Nanjing datushashi yanjiu*, 296-95.

<sup>35</sup> Minnie Vautrin, *Diaries of Minnie Vautrin* (New Haven: Yale Divinity School library, 1993), 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>37</sup> Wood, *Good Man*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Sheng Zhang, *Nanjing datushashi yanjiu* (Nanjing: Fenghuang Press, 2012), 318-19.

to humanitarian idea. Fascist German pilots were next to the Japanese pilots who bomb civilians.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Fascist Germany and Japan had signed the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936 and became allies. The Westerners in the International Committee considered the German members as the allies of the Japanese, and they needed the German members to negotiate with the Japanese authorities as their allies.

Indeed, the participation of Germans in the International Committee brought benefits. As mentioned earlier, the International Committee assembled fifteen members: seven Americans, four British, three Germans, and one Dane. Compared to the other nations' flags, especially the American flag, the Nazi flag received more respects from the Japanese.<sup>40</sup> For instance, on December 14, 1937, a group of Japanese soldiers entered a house with an American flag and an Embassy proclamation presented clearly outside and looted.<sup>41</sup> The Japanese soldiers, however, treated the Nazi flag in a different way. Based on Rabe's diary on September 22, 1937, to prevent his dugout, which was actually not bombproofs, from being the target of the Japanese airplanes, he "spread a 20-by-10-foot piece of canvas with a swastika painted on it."<sup>42</sup> In addition, Germans received many respects from the Chinese authorities as well. Many Chinese troops were trained by German instructors and equipped with German weapons. Similar to Father Jacquinot, the dominance of Germans in the International Committee (John Rabe, the chairman, was a German) provided advantages in the communications with both the Chinese and Japanese authorities. The cooperation of the Westerners with a German leadership became important to the success of the operation of the Nanjing Safety Zone.

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<sup>39</sup> Ristaino, *Jacquinot*, 57.

<sup>40</sup> Zhang, *Nanjing Datashashi*, 559.

<sup>41</sup> Vautrin, *Diary*, 109.

<sup>42</sup> Wood, *Good Man*, 6.

The establishment of an International Committee led by a German made the operation of the Nanjing Safety Zone under either the Chinese authorities or the Japanese authorities possible, but the operation of the Safety Zone was far from being a success. The International Committee members encountered some obstacles from both the Chinese and Japanese authorities before and after the occupation of Nanjing. They had to tackle the obstacles to achieve the success. Among the obstacles, communications with the Chinese authorities on evacuation of Chinese soldiers from the Safety Zone area prior to the fall of Nanjing and food shortage during the occupation became the most challenging. Eventually, the Westerners in Nanjing were able to solve the obstacles and made the operation a success.

The first obstacle was the evacuation of the Chinese troops from the Safety Zone area. In order to acquire the neutral status of the Safety Zone, the International Committee petitioned Chiang Kai-shek on December 9, 1937, asking that the Chinese and Japanese agreed to a three-day truce.<sup>43</sup> The International Committee suggested the Chinese military evacuate from the walled city of Nanjing in three days and requested the Japanese military not to attack the walled city of Nanjing so that civilians in the Safety Zone, which was inside the walled city, would not be hurt. Chiang rejected the proposal and was likely to have told General Tang to fight until the last minute.<sup>44</sup> The Chinese troops did not completely evacuate until December 13, 1937 when the fall of Nanjing was inevitable.<sup>45</sup>

Although the International Committee did not persuade Chiang to evacuate the Chinese troops completely, it was still able to ask as many soldiers as possible to leave the Safety Zone

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<sup>43</sup> Suping Lu, *They were in Nanjing: The Nanjing Massacre Witnessed by American and British Nationals* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 52.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Zhang, *Eyewitnesses*, 245.

area with the support of General Tang. In the letter sent on January 24, 1938 to his wife, Nina, Wilson Mills (1883-1959), an American missionary of the Northern Presbyterian Mission and an International Committee member, described the detailed efforts the International Committee had made since the day of the establishment of the International Committee for the Nanjing Safety Zone on November 22, 1937. The difficulty the International Committee had with the Chinese military in the beginning was the boundaries of the Safety Zone. Although the Chinese civil officials had agreed to the borders of the Nanjing Safety Zone, the military officials were reluctant to withdraw from the designed area and even requested a change of the border at the southwest side.<sup>46</sup> The International Committee was successful in solving the dispute with the Chinese military in the designed area when General Tang confirmed the southwest boundary of the Safety Zone with the International Committee. To ensure the implementation of the withdrawal, General Tang ordered three Chinese military men to accompany the International Committee members to inspect the Safety Zone, and all Chinese soldiers found remaining in the Safety Zone would be asked to leave immediately.<sup>47</sup> The persistence of the International Committee members made the existence of the Chinese troops in the Safety Zone area as minimal as possible. One of the most important conditions the Japanese asked in exchange for the respect of the Safety Zone was the Chinese troops not fight in the Safety Zone area.<sup>48</sup> Otherwise, the Japanese could bomb the area and civilians could be hurt.<sup>49</sup>

The second most challenging obstacle the International Committee faced were limits on supplies to the Safety Zone. The currency and food supplies promised by the Nationalist government did not come in full. For instance, Chiang Kai-shek issued 100,000 dollars to the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis S.C. Smythe, *Memorandum Note*, December 10, 1937 (New Haven: Yale Divinity School Library, 1993).

<sup>48</sup> Zhang, *Eyewitnesses*, 245.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

International Committee for operation on November 29, 1937.<sup>50</sup> By December 7, 1937, the International Committee, however, only received 40,000 dollars.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, currency was not useful because the Japanese did not allow purchase of food from outside Nanjing.<sup>52</sup> As for food supplies, the Chinese government arranged 30,000 bags of rice to the International Committee on December 1, 1937, but the Chinese government ended up delivering only half of rice next day.<sup>53</sup> According to a list of refugee camps in the Safety Zone, by December 17, 1937, some 50,000 refugees lived in twenty refugee camps.<sup>54</sup> Some refugee camps were especially crowded. For example, the tiny campus of Ginling Girls College on Ninghai Road was filled with 4,000 people.<sup>55</sup> There were more refugees in the Safety Zone area but not in the refugee camps. One of the Westerners depicted the situation of the Nanjing Safety Zone on January 16, 1938, saying:

We have a big problem on our hands now with his large number of people-perhaps 150,000 or more in this Refugee Area, and perhaps 60,000 in our refugee camps. Many of who have to be fed. Our food supplies are very short, and unless something can be done to get more supplies, famine conditions of a most serious nature face the people.<sup>56</sup>

The concern of famine was real. On November 30, 1937, Rabe made a list of problems the International Committee had to solve and food was among the problems.<sup>57</sup> It was an indication that the International Committee realized they might not have enough food to feed the refugees. The daily consumption of rice by the refugees also supported the concern of famine. “It is estimated it would take 1,600 bags of rice per day to feed the 250,000 people,” quoted from *Memorandum on Relief Situation* written on January 22, 1938 by the International Committee.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Woods, *The Good Man*, 40.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>52</sup> Brook, *Documents*, 98.

<sup>53</sup> Woods, *The Good Man*, 47.

<sup>54</sup> Brook, *Documents*, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Harold J. Timperley, *Japanese Terror in China* (New York: Modern Age Books, INC., 1938), 59.

<sup>57</sup> Woods, *Good Man*, 42.

<sup>58</sup> Brook, *Documents*, 97.

With the initial 15,000 bags of rice, the International Safety Zone could only feed the refugees for ten days. The International Committee was said to have some extra 60,000 bags of rice in the city and 34,000 bags of rice in the suburbs before the fall of Nanjing.<sup>59</sup> The issue with these extra food supplies, however, was it was not easy to transport them into the Safety Zone.

Being fearful of the Japanese violence, few coolies dared to deliver food for the International Committee. The Japanese had conducted a thorough search for the former Chinese soldiers in the Safety Zone, and many civilian males were taken and executed. Coolies' concern was reasonable. The Westerners therefore had to transport the food supplies on their own. The Japanese military created other difficulties. On December 16, 1937, Rabe addressed an issue in a letter sent to the Japanese Embassy that the Japanese patrols did not permit the trucks with food supplies to get into the Safety Zone.<sup>60</sup> Even worse, on December 16, 1937, the Japanese soldiers confiscated some rice loaded on a carriage near Ginling Girls College.<sup>61</sup> The reason the Japanese tirelessly obstructed the transportation of food supplies by the International Committee was simple: they anticipated forcing the refugees to return home by cutting off as many food supplies as possible to the International Committee. John Magee, an American who was the chair of the Nanjing International Red Cross Committee as well as a member of the International Committee, told his wife in January 1938 that the Japanese intended to terminate the operation of the Nanjing Safety Zone and control the resources like food and oil.<sup>62</sup> Murders, plundering and rape, however, made their attempt to restore the order in vain.<sup>63</sup> In spite of the intervention by the Japanese military, famine did not occur. The capability of the International Committee to feed the 250,000

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<sup>59</sup> Woods, *Good Man*, 42.

<sup>60</sup> Woods, *The Good Man of Nanking*, 74.

<sup>61</sup> Brook, *Documents*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Zhang, *Eyewitnesses*, 189.

<sup>63</sup> Brook, *Documents*, 97.



refugees with limited food supplies was an achievement of the Westerners. They successfully solved the obstacle of food shortage created by the Chinese and Japanese authorities.<sup>64</sup> Instead of suffering famine, refugees in the Safety Zone recovered from the loss of homes and lived stably.

Compared to the estimated population of more than 200,000 who were killed in the first month of the Japanese occupation, the International Committee successfully rescued 250,000 refugees through the Nanjing Safety Zone.<sup>65</sup> The Safety Zone itself became a steady society at the end of operation. Mills, in the letter sent to his wife on January 22, 1938, said the refugees, in the last few weeks, opened temporary shops and order in the Safety Zone was restored. Compared to the situation in the Safety Zone, there was nothing other than desolate streets outside.<sup>66</sup> Stability in the Nanjing Safety Zone was another achievement by the Westerners. In other words, the Westerners not only prevented famine but also brought stability to the refugees in the Safety Zone.

By the end of January 1938, the Japanese authorities intended to have the International Committee for the Nanjing Safety Zone replaced by the collaborationist Self-Government Committee, and the International Committee changed to the Nanjing International Relief Committee on February 18, 1938.<sup>67</sup> The International Committee members even made a last attempt to prevent the Nanjing Safety Zone and the Committee from being replaced. They were not successful. At the time the Japanese authorities finished registration of the population in January 1938, the International Committee was formally replaced by the Self-Government Committee. The Self-Government Committee was now responsible for caring the refugees. The

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<sup>64</sup> As mentioned earlier, the food supplies guaranteed by the Chinese authorities did not come in full.

<sup>65</sup> Wakabayashi, *The Nanking Atrocity*, 243.

<sup>66</sup> Zhang, *Eyewitness*, 246.

<sup>67</sup> Brook, *Documents*, 166.

Japanese would only sell rice to the Self-Government Committee and prohibit the food supplies to the International Committee.<sup>68</sup>

In conclusion, the concept of safety zone originated with Georges Saint-Paul from France, but the attempt to make safety zones become legitimate was a failure in Europe: the Geneva Convention of 1929 solely protected sick or wounded soldiers and did not include provisions of civilian protections. Although the concept was not widely accepted, pioneers like Henry George from Swiss still tried to put the operation of safety zones in reality. The attempt in the Spanish civil war by George in 1936 was a failure. Despite European failure in Spain, the Jacquinet Safe Zone in Shanghai became the first successful example in 1937.

Inspired by Father Robert Jacquinet de Besange, a group of Westerners in Nanjing established the Nanjing Safety Zone similar to the Jacquinet Safe Zone. The operation of the Nanjing Safety Zone, however, was not smooth. Unlike the Jacquinet Safe Zone, the International Committee for the Nanjing Safety Zone never received official recognition from the Japanese authorities. Moreover, compared to the situation in Shanghai, the lack of Western authorities in Nanjing was a disadvantage after the Western embassies had withdrawn. Without strong official backing, the International Committee members, who were mainly businessmen and missionaries, relied heavily on their German fellow members' nationality. Because Nazi Germany and Japan were allies, the Japanese military showed more respects to Germans. Germany also had a good relationship with the Chinese government in terms of military. As a result, having German members became important to the International Committee in the communications with both

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<sup>68</sup> Woods, *Good Man*, 119.

Chinese and Japanese sides. The International Committee held on from the establishment on November 22, 1937 to the return of the Western embassies in January 1938.

The two most challenging obstacles the International Committee faced were that the Chinese military was not cooperative in withdrawing soldiers from the Safety Zone area before the occupation and the food shortage during the occupation. With the support of General Tang, the International Committee was able to minimize the number of the Chinese soldiers remaining in the Safety Zone area so that the Japanese would not attack the area and the civilians would be prevented from injury. Both the Chinese and the Japanese authorities caused the food shortage. The Chinese government did not deliver the promised amount of rice before the fall of Nanjing, and the Japanese military obstructed the transportation of food supplies into the Safety Zone because they did not want the refugees to stay in the Safety Zone for a long time.

The refugees, however, remained in the Safety Zone because they were still afraid of the chaos outside the Safety Zone. Famine never occurred, and the refugees gradually established a steady society in the Safety Zone. Most of the 250,000 refugees in the Safety Zone survived. The operation of the Nanjing Safety Zone was a success, and the Westerners were the most important contributors to the achievement. Without their tireless negotiation with both the Chinese and Japanese authorities and their efforts in feeding the refugees, the establishment of the Safety Zone would not be accomplished and the operation could have been unsuccessful. Studies of the Rape of Nanking are still, however, not complete. The examinations of the origin of the Nanjing Safety Zone and the contributions of the Westerners in establishing and operating the Nanjing Safety Zone serve as a foundational reference for future research on the Rape of Nanking.

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